

Council resident survey to launch



All Council tenants, leaseholders and freeholders will receive the satisfaction survey, the first in six years, from early June

The Council has launched its first resident satisfaction survey in six years for all its tenants, leaseholders and freeholders.

The wide-ranging questionnaire will allow residents to share with the Council how they feel about

the various services they receive and will show how residents can get involved in future consultations. The results will tell the Council what residents think it is doing well and, equally, where the Council needs to make changes so the housing service can be the best it can be.

Surveys will be posted to all Council tenants, leaseholders and freeholders from early June, so residents are being asked to look out for it. People can also take part online by using the link and a unique ID number on their survey papers. Cllr Philip Glanville, Cabinet Member for Housing, said:

"Now that housing services are again being managed by the Council, this is a chance for all of our tenants, leaseholders and freeholders to tell us how they feel about the services they receive from us. "They will be playing a crucial role in shaping the future of the housing service, ensuring

we know where to focus our energies on making the improvements that matter most to them." The results will be gathered and analysed by an independent research company and published later this year. The report will help the Council focus on where improvement is most needed.

inside



EU referendum



Gorgeous gardens



Hackney People



Listings pull-out



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Hackney

Working for better homes



The Council is committed to innovative ways of providing new homes out of existing disused spaces for Hackney residents



Cllr Glanville and Jennifer Oyibo outside her new flat

A Hackney mum who lived in a studio flat with her two-year-old daughter is starting a new life in a two-bed flat that the Council transformed from a disused office space.

Jennifer Oyibo and her daughter recently moved from their Clapton property, where Jennifer had lived for four years, into the Council-funded conversion of Sylvester House in Hackney Central.

The former office, in Wilton Way, had stood empty for more than 10 years, before the Council refurbishment, which also includes a communal shed for all residents to use as part of the large, shared garden in the 43-flat block.

Jennifer, 28, said: "I don't know how my daughter would have coped in the studio flat now she's walking, it's so nice to have the space for her to run around."

The conversion was funded from right-to-buy sales and the housing needs capital budget.

Cllr Philip Glanville, Cabinet Member for Housing, said: "Jennifer's daughter now has a room of her own and space to grow and develop, as well as some outside space for her to play in."

"Projects like this show that the Council is committed to innovative ways of providing new homes out of existing disused spaces for Hackney residents."

Welcome to the first edition of your new-look Hackney housing news – 'Our Homes' – for Council tenants, leaseholders and freeholders.

Here you will learn about what's new in housing in the borough; what some of our inspiring residents and staff are doing to improve the communities they live in or serve; some of the Council's plans for the future of the housing service since we resumed management from Hackney Homes in April, and more.

Our Homes replaces the quarterly Hackney Homes newsletter that many of you will have last received in March. This is going to be a more frequent (bi-monthly) publication, and you will next see it inside Hackney Today, as a pull-out-and-keep insert from July onwards. We hope you enjoy the first edition. We welcome your input and feedback, your good

news housing or estates stories, and events. While we will do our best to include all your stories, we cannot guarantee publication.

**Cllr Philip Glanville,
Cabinet Member for Housing**



To contribute to a future edition, email: jane.ball@hackney.gov.uk; or call: 020 8356 8338.



Two new award-winning bicycle hangars have been installed in a Haggerston estate, seeing a tenfold increase in cycle and motorbike parking for residents.

The hangars, together with lockers, racks and wall anchors make up some of the 110 new spaces created in Fellows Court estate to give residents a safer and more secure alternative to locking bikes to railings and stairwells, and which had been deemed a fire hazard.

Cllr Feryal Demirci, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Sustainability, said: "The new parking has been well-received by residents. It is being used to full capacity, so we are looking at possibly fitting some more as soon as funding is available."



If you would like to request cycle parking, go to: hackney.gov.uk/cycle-safety-and-security

Children living in housing associations can take part in free art, music, storytelling, dancing and craft classes, when a creative workshop tours three Hackney libraries this summer

Artburst Minis is back with its new programme, 'Home Sweet Home', for youngsters aged two to five years old, between May and July, in Clapton, Stamford Hill and Hackney Central libraries.

The sessions are designed to improve children's confidence and skills in preparation for nursery or primary school. The workshops, which run in five-week blocks in the mornings and afternoons, are supported by the Council, Hackney Learning Trust, Family Mosaic, Sanctuary Housing and Hackney Marsh Partnership.

Booking is essential, email: info@artburst.co.uk; or call: 07435 788 190. More info: www.artburst.co.uk





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call: 020 8356 2280**



**Have you seen the new
housing service team?**

**SPOT
LIGHT**



Grow your own

Imagine waking up, sauntering down to your own large vegetable patch, digging up some fresh greens, and serving them that evening for dinner.

Fabiana works her plot in the Webb Estate community growing area

No, it's not some romanticised scene from 'The Good Life' but the rustic reality for residents on Webb Estate in Clapton, who transformed an unused, overgrown piece of land, into a fully-functioning allotment that is providing healthy home-grown fare for dozens of local families.

Public plots and gardens are famously oversubscribed across London, with some waiting lists running into decades, but the 'grow your own' revolution, which has been sweeping Hackney for around the last five years, has been changing all that.

In estates and blocks up and down the borough, green-fingered residents are not only digging, planting, tending and harvesting their way into a healthier lifestyle, but are reclaiming underused green spaces to change the look and feel of the outside of their homes for the better.

The work also serves to bring neighbours together. "The community definitely feels very proud," explained Fabiana De Iazzer, of the Webb Estate Community Growing Project, and the estate's Tenant Resident Association (TRA) chair. Adding: "There has been a great sense of achievement."

The project was put forward at a TRA meeting and was supported by the Council, which helped identify a suitable space and linked up residents with environmental regeneration charity, Groundwork.

Ruth Arnott, from Groundwork, and the project's head gardener, said: "We designed and built the main garden infrastructure and led gardening sessions – generally two hours on Saturday afternoons – teaching residents how to grow, work on projects like making bee hotels, or compost bins or wildflower beds."

However, it was a project not without its difficulties, or detractors.

"Initially, there was slight opposition from a few residents, but once started, people saw the benefits of growing your own veg, and hence spending less on shopping and encouraging healthy eating," said Fabiana.

She added: "The main difficulty in urban growing is finding a suitable space, with enough sunlight and healthy soil, and an area that's large enough."

The physicality of the project also proved challenging, with much of the hard slog of clearing branches, weeding and filling beds with soil having to be undertaken during the cold winter months before planting in the spring.

Ruth said: "Lots of teenagers came and got involved with lugging the soil, quite surprisingly. This made it more their own space, I think."

Sean McCann, Resident Participation Support Officer at the Council, added: "Residents have taken ownership of, and transformed, a community space. It's been a very successful project in terms of community cohesion and bringing the residents together."

Today, the fruits of their labour – and the land – are apparent: there are eight beds, one of which is a children's plot, and all of them teem with a variety of healthy goodies, including kale, tomatoes, courgette, sweetcorn, chard, pak choi, fennel, camomile beans and beetroot; there is also a flower patch and herb garden; a shed for equipment; and a couple of benches.

Ruth said: "Often I get texts from residents after one of our gardening sessions saying that they'd made a soup or stew with all the veg we'd harvested earlier in the day. That's what the project's all about."

So what advice would Fabiana give anyone wanting to start their own allotment? "Go for it. Get together as a community, get support from the Council who can signpost you to different organisations, and get advice and support. It'll bring the community together," she said.

The Webb Estate Community Growing Project won the Community Project of the Year at this year's Active Residents Awards.

Thinking of growing your own? Go to: www.hackney.gov.uk/grow-your-own; call Estate Environmental Services: 020 8356 1934; or email: ees@hackney.gov.uk



Hackney Active Resident Awards



Fabiana and daughter collecting award

THE unsung heroes of Hackney have been commended for making a difference to the lives of residents across the borough at this year's Active Residents Awards.

More than 60 nominations were received across six categories. The winners are:

- **Young Resident of the Year:** Suliman Baba Yemil
- **Resident of the Year:** Geoff Gleadhield
- **TRA of the Year:** Regents Estate TRA
- **TMO Resident Involvement Award:** Cranston TMO
- **Community Project of the Year:** Webb Estate Community Vegetable Allotment
- **Ron Devoti Award for Long Service:** George McGee.

Cllr Philip Glanville, Cabinet Member for Housing, said: "I'd like to congratulate everyone who won an award as well as all those nominated."

"It's great to hear all the stories from residents across the borough about their amazing work in helping make their communities better."

Each of the winners will be featured over the forthcoming editions of Our Homes.

I get texts from residents saying they've made a soup or stew with all the veg we harvested

- Ruth Arnott

Working for better homes



Are you a current Council tenant, someone on the housing waiting list, or a low-to-middle income house-buyer? Here's your guide to how a new set of laws could affect you

THE FACTS & FIGURES

The Housing and Planning Act became law on 12 May. It is expected to have a big impact on housing in Hackney.

In its current form, it will likely mean far less social housing available for people on waiting lists, increased rent for some Council tenants, less choice for existing Council tenants looking to move, and fewer genuinely affordable new homes being built.

It will also almost certainly result in the forced sale of hundreds of Council homes, with the proceeds going to Government, and an increase in the borough's housing-related costs by around an extra £18 million pounds a year, money that the Council could be spending on services for residents.

How will that impact you?

If you're a current council tenant:

- Longer waits to move between properties
- Rent increases for those with a household income of more than £40,000

If you're on the council house waiting list or in temporary accommodation:

- Fewer homes – the Council will be forced to sell an estimated 700 homes over the next five years
- Less choice of homes
- Longer waits for a home
- End of lifetime tenancies

If you're looking to buy your first home:

- Fewer genuinely affordable homes being built, with £450,000 'Starter Homes' prioritised over properties for social rent or shared-ownership.

Despite now being law, there are still many details that need to be agreed in the coming months, including when each new policy starts. For more info, visit: www.hackney.gov.uk/housing-act

Right to Buy

The Act extends the 'Right to Buy' to housing association tenants who will be able to buy their home with a discount of up to £103,900. After a designated period, they could then sell the property at market value.

The Government will refund housing associations for the discount. To recoup its costs it will force councils to sell some of their social housing on the open market, when properties become vacant, and then take the proceeds.

There will likely be a value threshold and formula to dictate how many homes a council must sell. Early modelling in Hackney indicates that up to 700 Council homes may have to be sold over the next five years. Many of these will probably be family-sized, ground floor homes or newly built properties.

It is currently unclear whether the Council will be able to retain enough money from the forced sales to build like-for-like replacement homes. There are more than 2,500 households living in temporary accommodation provided by the Council.

They will have to wait longer for a home and the Council will have to pay about an extra £18 million in year in associated costs.



Pay to Stay

Council tenants whose household has a combined annual income of more than £40,000 will have to pay more rent. The full details are not yet confirmed, but it's expected that for every pound a household earns over £40,000, they pay 15p a year more in rent.

As an example, a council household with a combined income of £50,000, who currently pay £434 a month, would see their annual rent increase by £1,500, or an extra £125 a month (a 29 per cent increase).

The additional rental income is paid to the Government, which intends to spend it to help pay off the national debt. This means local residents paying more but receiving the same level of service.



The Government has indicated that Tax Credits, Child Benefit, Disability Living Allowance, Housing Benefit and Universal Credit will not be considered income.

Starter homes

'Starter homes' will be new-build properties available at a 20 per cent discount for first-time buyers aged between 23 and 40. In London, their price has to be capped at £450,000. The Government says they will be classed as 'affordable housing', which currently means either social rent, shared ownership or affordable rent.

Based on the average price of a flat in Hackney, it's anticipated that all 'starter homes' in the borough would be the maximum £450,000. With a 10 per cent deposit, a household would need an annual income of about £115,000 to raise the mortgage necessary to afford a 'starter home'. This is far in excess of the median income of households in employment in the borough of £35,140.

Generally, developers are supposed to provide a 50/50 split of market and 'affordable housing' when building a new development. They will be encouraged to offer 'starter homes' as their 'affordable housing' provision, and councils will have an obligation to promote 'starter homes' in planning applications even if they will not meet local housing need in their area.



The Council has serious concerns that the forced emphasis on 'starter homes' will be at the expense of genuinely affordable new homes – through social rent or shared ownership – that might otherwise be built, reducing the supply of housing for those on low-to-middle incomes.





**To report a repairs issue,
call: 020 8356 3691**

**The next edition of
'Our Homes' is due out in July**



"This Act will be hugely damaging to the social fabric of inner London boroughs like Hackney. It does nothing meaningful to address the capital's housing crisis, improve the stability or affordability of private renting, or deliver on the homeownership aspirations of residents, the vast majority of who are currently priced out of a market which all too often serves developers and overseas investors at the expense of Londoners.

"Its content has been criticised by housing experts and providers on all sides, and it's disappointing Government chose to ignore the many sensible amendments proposed by the House of Lords. Very few people outside of Government think the content of this Act is a credible way of achieving its supposed aims, and even fewer think it will address the housing challenges faced by boroughs like Hackney.

"Throughout the Bill's progress through Parliament we have been working hard to influence its policies and mitigate some of the worst proposals. We will continue pushing Government to try to ensure the finer details of the Act's policies are worked out in ways which help address the needs of Hackney and our aspiration to keep it one of the most vibrant, diverse and dynamic boroughs in the country." **Cllr Philip Glanville, Cabinet Member for Housing**



Its content has been criticised by housing experts and providers on all sides and it's disappointing the Government chose to ignore the many sensible amendments proposed by the House of Lords

- Cllr Philip Glanville



End of lifetime tenancies

Councils will no longer be able to offer new tenants lifetime tenancies. Instead, there will be fixed-term tenancies of between two and 10 years, which will be reviewed at the end of each term. This could be longer for tenants with children, though this has yet to be confirmed.

Existing tenants who have to move as a result of regeneration or major works will maintain their current lifetime tenancy. Succession rights to a deceased tenant's property will remain for spouses or civil partners, though the new tenancy will be a fixed-term tenancy. This is a substantial reduction in the tenancy succession rights for existing tenants.

Private rented sector

Councils can request a 'banning order' against a landlord or agent who has committed an offence. Bans must be for at least six months and the breach of an order can result in a fine of up to £5,000. The Government will maintain a database of 'rogue' landlords and letting agents, which councils will be able to access.

A tribunal will be able to impose a 'rent repayment order' on a landlord who has committed an offence, which a tenant can apply for directly. The rent can be recouped by the tenant if they have paid it, or by a council if the rent was from Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

What has the Council been doing?

During the past year the Council has regularly given Government its views on different policies, through written submissions and Cllr Philip Glanville speaking to the Bill committee in Parliament. These opportunities were also used to suggest ways the Bill could be improved.

Examples of our suggestions, some of which Government has accepted, include:

- Right to Buy – like-for-like replacement of homes the Council is forced to sell; not having to immediately sell newly-built homes
- Pay to Stay – benefits not to be counted as income; link the £40,000 threshold to inflation
- Starter homes – starter homes not to be classed as 'affordable housing'; councils to be free to decide what mix of new properties best suit local need
- End of lifetime tenancies – tenants offered longer tenancies than the initial two-to-five years proposed
- Private rented sector – through its '10 Steps to a Better Private Sector Renting' campaign (hackney.gov.uk/10-steps), the Council has called for a range of measures to improve the private rented sector. These included creating a list of 'rogue' landlords. Cllr Glanville and Council officers have also been raising awareness of the Bill and its implications among a wide-range of residents and organisations.



What's next?

Work will now begin on agreeing the finer policy details, which could take several months. There are likely to be more Government consultations and opportunities for MPs to debate proposals in Parliament.

The Council will, where possible, contribute to these discussions to try to ensure policies are worked out in ways that help address the needs of Hackney.



Working for better homes



Silver Linings for Hackney's older residents with fun, free activities

A project like this gives older people something else to talk about other than aches and pains!" said one member of Silver Linings, a series of creative classes specially designed to get the over-50s helping each other, meeting new people and learning new skills.

Activities are held at four venues across the borough – in Clapton, Hackney Wick, Hoxton and Stamford Hill – and are led by older people, with activities chosen by those who attend the clubs.

Maureen Sammon, 81, from Trowbridge Estate, recently enjoyed a mosaic-making class.



Mosaic-making at Silver Linings

"It's a lot better than sitting on your own. The activities are brilliant, mosaic is something I've always wanted to do. I'd say to other older people in Hackney: make the effort to come, it's so worthwhile," she said.

The sessions, which are held monthly, have so far included micro-vegetable gardening, mosaic art and ballroom dancing.

Alongside getting older people trying new things and getting to know their neighbours, the project allows them to make a contribution to their local community through the Silver Linings Incentive Scheme.

It is part of Connect Hackney, which is led by older

people, for older people. It is managed by Hackney CVS and funded by the Big Lottery's Ageing Better Fund.

To get involved or to find out more, call Clare Norwood on: **020 8510 5403**; email: clare.norwood@groundwork.org.uk; or visit: www.groundwork.org.uk



It's a lot better than sitting on your own

Sheena Marsh, 59 – Wick Village



The Neighbourhood Contact Centre – the phone and online hub that serves Hackney tenants and leaseholders – has won a customer service accolade, following years of hard work by staff.

The team scored above the national average

on all three stages of assessment by the Institute of Customer Service to gain The Service Mark accreditation, including:

- Scoring an average of 70 (out of 100) in a minimum of 100 customer satisfaction surveys
- Scoring an average of 70 (out of 100) in a business benchmarking survey taken by staff
- A successful site visit carried out by an independent assessor.

Resident Alice Burke, who also sits on the Housing Advisory Board, said: "Residents call about a

problem that matters a lot to them, having someone at the other end of the phone who will listen to them properly, be understanding and polite while putting a real effort into helping to solve the problem is great. The Neighbourhood Contact Centre has been a real positive change for residents."

The Service Mark is a nationally-recognised customer service award.

To get in touch with the Neighbourhood Contact Centre, call: **020 8356 2299**; email: neighbourhoods@hackney.gov.uk



Staff with their accreditation



**To report antisocial behaviour
call 020 8356 3310**



**Have you seen the new
housing services staff**

**SPOT
LIGHT**

Shaping their future

Tenants and leaseholders told the Council they wanted to see more joined-up communications between the housing service; effective and efficient follow-ups on repairs issues; and more help provided for the most vulnerable people, at a wide-ranging summit with residents on 17 May.

Tenant and Resident Association chairs were among the 37 people who took part in a series of workshops hosted by the Council at Haggerston Community Centre, in Haggerston Road, with the aim of helping to shape the future direction of resident engagement now the Council's housing service has come back in-house.

The day sought to understand what aspects of the housing service and resident engagement works well; what can be improved; and how to better link the services the Council provides.

Four aspects of the resident engagement were discussed: communications and events; community halls; budgets; and decision-making.

Cllr Philip Glanville, Cabinet Member for Housing, said: "It was great

to talk to so many passionate residents, recognise many shared frustrations and get a detailed understanding of what their priorities are for the housing service.

"Talking and listening to our residents, and acting upon their concerns, is our number one priority; and the lynchpin to ensuring the housing service is the best it can be, that residents are fully involved and that it meets their rightly high expectations now the service is back in house.

"We've been given a lot to think about – and do. I'd like to thank all those who gave up their time to take part."

A report on the workshops and the actions being taken will be published later this summer.

The workshops form part of a resident engagement review being undertaken by the Council with the aim of improving how it better interacts with the communities it serves.



The Council is recruiting a panel of residents who will be involved in helping shape the review. If you would like to be considered, get in touch by email: sam.lewis@hackney.gov.uk; or call: 020 8356 7845.

Police praise estate officer for helping stop burglars

ESTATE Officer for Homerton, Helder da Costa, has been praised by police for his swift action in deterring burglars and helping police work, which saw the setup of a Neighbourhood Watch.

After a spate of burglaries, police identified an empty property that was being used by criminals. Within 48 hours, Helder (pictured) had arranged for the property to be secured and fences repaired. Helder said he was happy to help the police do their job and to meet residents to reassure them that action was being taken. Due to Helder's prompt action the police now believe crime will be 'drastically' reduced in the area.



Changes to service charges

RENTS for Council tenants have reduced by one per cent from April as a result of a new national policy. At the same time, some service charges, set by the Council, have risen slightly. Cllr Philip Glanville said: "It's important tenants pay their rent on time to help with the cost of services while helping to avoid debt and reminder letters."

A letter has been sent to residents explaining the changes, along with details for rental payment help and advice.



Residents have been sent letters of the changes to charges



Ten tenant groups agree partnership with Council

AN already successful partnership has been renewed, thanks to an important strategy that was negotiated between the Council and 10 tenant management groups, who together deliver services to 5,000 households across Hackney.

The new strategy statement for tenant management organisations (TMOs), resident-run estate management groups, enshrines a commitment from the Council to involve TMOs in all resident engagement events and housing consultations.

This will strengthen the partnership between the Council and residents, and bring to life the third Hackney Mayoral priority: 'Making Hackney a place where everyone can contribute, through listening to residents, and involving them in the decisions we make and the things we do'.

The new document included nine points that recognises the importance of TMOs and underpins the commitment of Council officers and TMO representatives to work together on service delivery.

Cllr Philip Glanville, Cabinet Member for Housing, said: "TMOs are a key part of the borough's housing provision; they enable residents to really shape and deliver the services they receive and have an important role in decision-making on issues that will affect them. "It is great that we have this strategy to recognise their importance and to commit to working even better together in the future as the Council renews its focus on housing management."



For contact information, or to find out more about TMOs in Hackney, visit: www.hackney.gov.uk/tenant-management-organisations

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